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ABSTRACT

The premise of this article is that there is no such thing as a value free education; that values appear in each public school's goals, curriculum, and activities as well as in the requirements set by the state. And it is the local school board that defines the goals and adopts the policies that reflect the values each community wants to transmit to its children. In order to accomplish this, boards might consider certain crucial questions, namely: which values are to be taught? How should those values be taught? and Who determines the community's common values? Various ramifications of these questions are noted, after which the paper goes on to outline an action plan for developing values education in local schools and to highlight strategies for conducting a public forum and developing a long-term program. Findings of a survey that examined almost 9,000 young people's ethical attitudes and behaviors are presented immediately following this article. The findings of this and other studies indicate that young people are becoming more maternalistic and less ethical, and it is left up to the reader to decide if values education is needed in the schools. (LMI)

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Values Education and the Local School Board

by Karen W. Powe

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Values Education and the Local School Board

by Karen W. Powe

There is no such thing as a free lunch, and there is no such thing as a value-free education.

Perhaps the most significant responsibility of educators and education policymakers is recognition, indeed the celebration, of the concept that education does not just transmit facts; that education helps shape attitudes and beliefs, and has long been an instrument for encouraging and or discouraging certain ideas.

Frank Newman, president of the Education Commission of the States, has said, "Schools teach values in profound ways, whether they think they do or not." Mr. Newman suggests that values appear in the goals school set, the curriculum, in state requirements, in school activities, in what we say and in what we do. It is the local school board that defines the school district's goals and adopts the education policies that reflect the values each community wants to transmit to its children.

There would seem to be a set of values that we can agree upon in a democratic society. These include honesty, integrity, responsibility, hard work and respect for others. However, we err if we assume agreement about the basic values that should be part of public education without community involvement in and public debate about which values should be encouraged and how those values should be expressed.

Newman advises that the central piece in establishing board policies related to values is public discussion of what those values should be. Robert J. Rader, Counsel and Director of Policy and Employee Relations Services for the New York State School Boards Association, recommends that school board policy be written to ensure that the values held by the community, within the limits set by law, are what is taught in school.

Education policymakers need to ask questions about the purpose of values education and about what we want to achieve. For example, should children be taught to agree with their parents on every issue or, in a society that values education and freedom, should children be encouraged to form their own opinions? School officials must carefully evaluate what ideas are taught and what, if any, objection there might be.

Determining *what* values we want to teach, *how* we want to teach those values, and *who* is participating in the selection of common values are critical steps in assuring that our public schools are correctly assessing and meeting each community's wants and needs. There are a number of questions school boards might consider in making those determinations.

What We Want to Teach: Examining the Content of Policy Regarding Values Education

- Is the policy within the scope of the board's discretionary authority as granted by state statutes?
- Is it consistent with state and federal law and with the provisions of the U.S. Constitution?
- Is it reasonable and free from arbitrariness and capriciousness?
- Is it judicious and fair?
- Does it have as its purpose the realization of an educationally valid and desirable end or objective?
- Does it have a substantial relationship to a legitimate purpose?
- Does it reflect sound judgment?
- Does it reflect community desires for public education?

How We Want to Teach Values: Reviewing Curricula and Programs

- Is the purpose clearly to promote educational goals with no intent to advance or inhibit any particular belief?
- Is the expected effect to advance educational goals and not to promote or impugn religious or other beliefs?
- Does the curriculum merely expose students to ideas that may possibly be at variance with particular beliefs without coercing conduct prohibited by their beliefs?
- If the school board is in doubt about any of the above questions, has the board attorney reviewed

continued on page 2

Inside Updating. . .

Reader's Survey ..... **p. 5**
Trends ..... **p. 7**
Math Education
Healthline ..... **p. 11**
Evaluating Your Health Education Program
Court View ..... **p. 13**
Academic Freedom
Policy Adviser ..... **p. 16**
Policy Manuals

EA025643

Values Education from page 1

the issue in light of current Constitutional case law?

Who Determines Our Common Values: Assessing Community Involvement

- Does the district have an up-to-date policy for selection and reconsideration of curriculum and instructional materials?
- Are parents and community members included in the textbook selection process through opportunity to review and comment?
- Is there a procedure for parent complaints that requires their written documentation?
- Does the district have regular communication with educational, civic, service, religious and political organizations in the community and state?
- Does the district have a policy or negotiated clause in the teachers' contract regarding academic freedom?

In education, we are concerned with the promotion of ideas, not their limitation. We want to ensure that our children have an understanding of and tolerance for others' views, and the understanding and practice of the basic rights of freedom of expression, to be informed, and make our own decisions. Indeed, the freedom to read, write, speak and, therefore, to learn and think is essential to a progressive, inventive society.

Neither censorship nor indoctrination is acceptable in education. Each indicates little understanding of children, learning and democracy. Each promotes ideological acceptance rather than educational soundness; leads to fragmented concepts; and denies abilities to assimilate knowledge. In short, challenges to freedom of speech and thought are a threat to national health and well-being.

An Action Plan for Values Education

The development of our future citizens determines our national future. If the United States will continue to be the productive, innovative and caring society that we have prided ourselves on being throughout our history, we must teach our children more than reading, writing and figuring. We must ensure that the values held dear in our Bill of Rights, our Constitution and our myriad of laws protecting human worth and dignity are understood and accepted by those who will lead and support our nation in the future.

The American public education system is a critical part of the means by which we will transmit our ideals and beliefs to our children. Schools, in league with families, religious and civic organizations and our democratic government, can assure the continuing strength and success of the "democratic experiment" we started over 200 years ago.

The basis of that marvelous experiment is the local community. In considering what each community expects its public schools to provide to students, who decides what is wanted and how schools can meet those expectations, local school boards need an action plan. The following is an outline that may serve as the basis for developing a plan for values education in local schools.

Determining the What, Who and How

- Organize community meetings to discuss shared values and ways to strengthen public education in your school district, and to hear debates on important issues affecting the district's schools and families. Ensure that a balance of views is presented at all meetings with adequate opportunity for questions.
- Develop clearly written policies supporting programs and curricula, for selection of age-appropriate books and materials, subjects, and teaching methods, providing guidance for implementation, and establishing procedures for review and handling concerns. Assess the effectiveness of policies in place to protect the freedom of teachers, students and families.
- Seek parental/community representation on all selection and complaint committees.
- Emphasize the importance of First Amendment rights of freedom of speech and press that guarantee freedom to speak, read, teach, learn and discuss.
- Stress the importance of adhering to policies and procedures and retaining materials in classrooms and libraries until any complaint procedures are completed.
- Be sensitive to differing opinions within the community among various groups and know the leaders of the special interest groups (civil rights, women's rights, ethnic religious, political organizations, etc.). Recognizing the causes of controversy is important in anticipating challenges and dealing with them.
- Know what your board is willing to do. What the board says in its policies and what it is willing to support when challenged should be the same.

And, as obvious as it seems, be honest and forthright in all your dealings.

In the Public Forum

- Be prepared with facts (what you know about what your community wants), policies and goal statements (how your school board has responded to those wants) and statutes (what the law requires).

continued on page 3

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Values Education (from page 2)

- Expose misrepresentations immediately. Show the broader context of narrow quotations and explain district practices.
- Use the public forum to educate your public and demonstrate professional control, expertise and assertiveness. Inform everyone about the policies and procedures in place for choosing materials and programs, for handling complaints, and for keeping the community informed and involved. It is particularly important for school district staff to understand all pertinent policies and procedures. In a public forum, remember to state the rules for participation, including time limits for speaking. Stick to the rules. Maintaining order enables you to retain control.
- Develop positive and proactive relationships with the press through comprehensive press releases and an open door policy. Address questions and issues in radio and newspaper interviews.
- Extol the positive — celebrate teacher and student excellence.
- Develop communication with staff to keep them informed and to stop rumors.
- Listen carefully to all concerns. Ask questions that clarify statements and show your interest.
- Respond professionally and politely to all concerns. Parental fear is real and must be dealt with sincerely.
- Take time to consider concerns and to respond. Time allows the *entire* community to be heard from. Try, however, to address all concerns/complaints as expeditiously as possible. Do not allow concerns to fester unattended and build strength.
- Remain positive. When strong differences of opinion are expressed, maintain your self-control and always show the same respect to others that you reasonably expect for yourself. Respect and civility go a long way toward establishing your professionalism and demonstrating the confidence you have in your position, particularly in the face of yelling and rudeness on the part of your opponents. Your *modus operandi* should be to respond to false accusations calmly and with the correct information.

In the Long-Term

- Find out what the community *really* wants and expects from its schools. Identify and address the central community values that the schools should reinforce. A Michigan superintendent has convincingly stated the need for this step: "Our children do not leave values, attitudes and feelings at the doorstep when they come into the classroom." In other words, education is not and never has been value-free. It is incumbent upon a responsible and responsive education system to determine which values are commonly held and should be transmitted to students. NSBA's *Education Goals Survey* is an example of the tools available to help you in determining where to start and how to proceed with this process.
- Work to keep your alliance strong and the community involved in the business of providing quality education for all children.
- Develop ongoing development/inservice training for everyone in the school district. Each teacher, administrator, support staff member, school board member, and involved community member needs continuing education about teaching values. Such training should demonstrate:
  - how the professional interests of educators are concerned
  - educators' rights to present controversial issues
  - how the process for selection of educational materials is determined
  - how the community's interests are protected, and
  - how the continuance of America's democratic society depends upon an education system that defines and transmits common values.
- Remember that, as school board members, you represent a broad, generally supportive community. Keep things in perspective, recalling that most petitions/challenges represent less than two in ten registered voters.

Conclusion

In addressing the importance of the school board role in teaching values, Rader offers the following policy perspective: "In almost every area [in which] a board develops policy, it sets the tone and provides leadership, direction and credibility. Whether it be fairness in student discipline, early graduation requirements, setting standards for what is permitted in student publications, or its own rules for governing meetings, boards set moral tones and members serve as role models for the whole school community. By setting high standards, which are also fair, boards best communicate the values they hope to teach."

His point is clear: Values is not just another subject to teach in classrooms, but a knowledge we all share and behavior we display every day. This position is supported by author and teacher Howard Kirschenbaum. Writing in the *Phi Delta Kappan*, Kirschenbaum says: "Values education is comprehensive insofar as it takes place *throughout the school* — in the classroom, in extracurricular activities, in career education and counseling, in awards ceremonies, in all aspects of school life.

"The elementary principal who, during morning announcements, thanks the student who turned in a lost wallet; the 10th-grade teacher who uses cooperative groups in class; the second-grade teachers who spend a whole month centering their students' reading, writing and other activities on the value of 'kindness'; the school counselor who uses values clarification activities in career counseling; the social studies teacher who discuss moral dilemmas in conjunction with a unit on the Civil War; the teachers who are seen smoking or not smoking; the principal who has the courage to cancel the rest of the football season because his school started a serious fight at the last football game — collectively, these examples begin to suggest the meaning of comprehensive values education in schools.

"Comprehensive values education [also] takes place *throughout the community*. Parents, religious institutions,

continued on page 4

Values Education
(from page 3)

civic leaders, police, youth workers and community agencies participate. To the extent that all these sources are consistent in their expectations, their modeling, their norms and their rules, a comprehensive approach has a greater likelihood of succeeding in influencing community values and morals in youths and adults." ("A Comprehensive Model for Values Education and Moral Education," *Phi Delta Kappan*, June 1992)

Dr. Fred Close, Director of Education for the Ethics Resource Center, has considered the issue of teaching values in the public schools and concludes that "every member of society 'teaches' ethics — to children, to each other. Ethics instruction in a classroom setting is simply an extension of this...Contrary to values clarification theory, it is not dangerous or unwise to let one's 'values' show. The fact is that they will show anyway."

In terms of how we determine the "right" values to teach, Close says: "Human beings have not achieved utter certainty about every moral issue, and since these issues arise with new situations, we probably never will. But no one would argue that schools ought not to teach physics because many questions remain unanswered. We teach what we know about physics now so the next generation can help us solve our questions in the future. The same is true of our moral knowledge....A school curriculum devoid of ethics sends a moral message: that ethics doesn't count." ■

Is Values Education Really Important?

In 1991 and 1992, the Joseph and Edna Josephson Institute of Ethics conducted an extensive survey of American ethical attitudes and behavior involving nearly 9,000 young people and adults. Michael Josephson, founder and president of the Institute has analyzed the results in a report, entitled "The Hole in the Moral Ozone: Ethical Values, Attitudes, and Behavior in American Schools."

The survey findings included identification of a high proportion of young people who are actively struggling with their conceptions of ethics and their own behaviors, and a distressingly large number of high school and college students who regularly engage in dishonest and irresponsible behaviors: They lie, cheat and steal at work, school and in their personal relationships.

A sampling of current student values and a look at some of the changes in attitudes and behaviors of young people over a 20 year period — compiled, analyzed and/or reviewed by Josephson — appear below. We leave it to you, dear reader, to decide if values education is needed in the public schools.

Student Values

Josephson found the "[t]he problem is not that young people do not value honesty and integrity. The problem is that they value other things more." To reveal values and value priorities, survey participants were asked to indicate the importance they attached to an extensive list of potential values. College students and the out-of-school group were more likely than high school students to rank ethical values more highly than nonethical ones. Yet only the out-of-school respondents ranked *being honest and trustworthy* as the number one value. This is how students ranked their values. The percentage represents the students who listed the value as "essential."

High School Students:

1. Getting a job you enjoy	77%
2. Getting into college	73%
3. Getting a well-paid job	66%
4. Having trusting personal relationships	66%
5. Being respected for your integrity	55%
6. Being honest and trustworthy	54%

College-Age Students:

1. Getting a job you enjoy	78%
2. Imparting firm ethical values to your children	71%
3. Having trusting personal relationships	67%
4. Being honest and trustworthy	63%
5. Being respected for your integrity	58%
6. Being kind and caring	52%

Josephson also shares the results of other studies and surveys, including a comparative study of high school student behavior over the past three decades conducted by Dr. Fred Schab of the University of Georgia. Results of the Schab study show a sharp increase in unethical behaviors and attitudes since 1969. A few examples:

Conduct:	Lying to parents about school	1969: 55%	1979: 60%	1989: 70%
	Signing parent's name to an excuse	1969: 26%	1979: 42%	1989: 48%
	Taking library books without checking them out	1969: 8%		1989: 19%
Attitudes:	"Honesty is the best policy."	1969: 82%		1989: 60%
	"Crime does not pay."	1969: 89%		1989: 65%
	"People who cheat can't be trusted."	1969: 61%		1989: 41%
	"Most people in the USA are honest."	1969: 49%		1989: 24%

The Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles conducts an annual survey of American college and university freshman, involving some 240,000 students. Recent surveys show several trends in the area of values indicating that young people are becoming more materialistic and less ethical. When asked to rate 20 "life goals," today's college students are much more likely to choose "being well-off financially" as a central goal than were previous years' students.

The data reveal that, in 1970, 39 percent of the surveyed students listed their financial goals as very important or essential. In 1989, that proportion had risen to 75 percent. Not surprisingly, the number one value in 1979 was "developing a meaningful philosophy of life," chosen by 82 percent of the survey participants. In 1989, only 41 percent of the students ranked it as a very important or essential value.

Statistical data above was reported in "The Hole in the Moral Ozone: Ethical Values, Attitudes, and Behaviors in American Schools" by Michael Josephson, president of The Joseph and Edna Josephson Institute of Ethics. The full 84-page report, plus appendices, is available for $15.00 (plus $3.25 postage and handling) from The Joseph and Edna Josephson Institute of Ethics, 310 Washington Blvd., Suite 104, Marina del Ray, California 90292. Phone: (310)306-1868. FAX: (310)827-1864.